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ABSTRACT

The influence of positivism and post-positivism in public education is critiqued. Post-positivism is identified with the movement extending from T. S. Kuhn (1962, 1970). Logical positivism is discussed as a paradigm based on the philosophy of Enlightenment, the age of reasoning, and the work of A. Compte. The critical theory of society, emerging from the thinking and writing of the Frankfort School for Social Research between 1920 and 1940 is also considered. Like post-positivism, critical theory rejects logical positivism. On these bases, organizational alternatives for education are forwarded. The three major alternatives covered are: (1) loose coupling as described by K. E. Weick (1976); (2) organized anarchies and garbage can models as described by M. D. Cohen and J. G. March (1974) and March and J. P. Olson (1976); and (3) organizational culture as described by T. E. Deal and A. A. Kennedy (1981). The pertinence of these intellectual movements on education in Texas is outlined. (TJH)

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The Courage to Be Creative

by

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The Courage to be Creative

> Creativity is a necessary sequel to being. Furthermore, the word courage in my title refers, to the particular kind of courage essential for the creative act. This is rarely acknowledge...and even more rarely written about.
>
> Rollo May from The Courage to Create (1975)

The purpose of this paper is to critique and set in the context of both theory and practice of educational organizations the papers which proceed it and in doing so express some of my own biases. That statement alone sets the warning with which these comments must be received.

Phillips in his recent work (1987) pleads guilty to being a closet positivist. In addition he notes that although it is said that positivism is dead "...rumors abound concerning positivism's continued healthy existence in hiding" (p.36). Further he argues that "...of the various doctrines which from time-to-time have been called positivistic, some have been (properly) crushed by the weight of criticism, but others have survived.... To put it bluntly, some of the most boisterous celebrates at positivism's wake are actually more positivistic than they would care to admit" (p.44).

I will return to this theme later for that statement may be correct in both directions. Not only may some post-positivitists be more positivistic but some positivists may be more post-positivistic than they show or care to admit. Additionally, as Phillips state, (p.23) "...there would be no bar to accepting both the "rival" paradigms for they are not really (emphasis added) rivals! In other words, if

paradigms are incommensurable [in Kuhn's terms] a person is free to accept both of them." I argued that point almost ten years ago in my discussion of the Griffiths/Greenfield debate (lutz, 1979). I will argue it again here.

First let me, with Phillips, make my guilty plea. I am a closet post-positivist. Others have accused me of being a dyed-in-the-wool positivist. (No pun is intended here as I critique a Australian's paper). Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their book Naturalistic Inquiry (which as Phillips 1985:85 correctly points out is anti-naturalistic given the usual defination of natural science) refer to me in the following context:

> It has not escaped the notice of conventional researchers [positivists one presumes] that there exists some problem in studying the concept of loose coupling using standard research procedures.... The answer of at least one methodologist is to throw out the baby with the bath water.... Hear Frank Lutz (1982:657):
>
> "But what seems to be implied is that, although not a sufficient condition, unpredictability is still a necessary condition of a loosely coupled organization. If so, the loose coupling...is not a useful research model. Predictability is a goal of, if not the essential function of research." (emphasis added)
>
> It seems unlikely that a better example of dissonance will ever be found (p.183-184).

Given that Lincoln and Guba may be forgiven the cliche above perhaps I can be forgiven for noting, with most politicians, that it makes little difference what they say about you as long as they spell your name correctly. Actually I never contended that there was not a lot of loose coupling in most education organizations or that loose

coupling was not a usable concept for studying education organizations. I have claimed that it operates in mischievous fashions (Lutz 1982). Additionally, I have been known to use "naturalistic" methods rather than "conventional" methods to study organizations, but I have tended to call that method ethnography, although some may disagree. The point of this is not to contest Lincoln and Guba's essentially excellent work but to admit publicly, so that it cannot escape others: If I am a positivists, I am a closet post- positivists as well and even have some leaning toward critical theory. Having sounded that warning let me proceed with the task at hand. Perhaps while being viewed by some as a positivists exhibiting a grand amount of "dissonance" when confronted with post-positivistic methods, and now having admitted to actually being a "closet" post-positivists, I may be suited to this task.

Logical Positivism in Public Education

The traditional approaches to public education, the structure of the organization and politics of education, and the development of curriculum and the theories of teaching/learning are engendered, nurtured and bounded by a logical positivist epistemology. For purposes for this discussion I define logical positivism as a paradigm based on the philosophy of Enlightenment, the age of reason and the work of Auguste Comte. The twentieth century version of positivism growing out of the Vienna Circle is called logical positivism. It rejects metaphysics as a way of knowing, replacing it with a science based on the

observation of things, inductive reasoning, observation of "hard" data, and the submission of these to mathematical systems, especially statistical inference.

Post-Positivism

Post-positivism refers to the work in the philosophy of science usually identified with Kuhn (1962 and 1970) which questions the fundamental tenets of logical positivism. It insists that meaning is at least as real as the object intended to project that meaning and therefore meaning is the correct subject of science. It contends that any epistemology or paradigm possesses a core set of beliefs or tenets which cannot be altered even in the face of experimental falsification and thus the paradigm is immune to empirical testing. Extreme positions of post-positivistic thinking have led to various types of relativism and sometimes result in confusing post-positivism with existentialism.

Critical Theory

The critical theory of society grew out of the thinking and writings of the Frankfort School for Social Research between 1920 and 1940. It takes its starting point from German Idealism and is firmly grounded in the sociological theory of Karl Marx. It neither promotes nor supports the political realities of Leninist or Stalinist Russia, which it attacked as more despicable than capitalist bureaucracy. Critical theory parallels post-positivistic thought in that it rejects the premises of logical positivism, centers on

the human condition, insists on dialectics as the method for seeking truth (rather than only the observation of things) and requires that theory be tested and demonstrated in practice (Slater, 1977).

Products of Positivistic Thinking in Education

Perhaps the best illustration of the use of logical positivism in educational organizations is Weber's (1947) notions of bureaucracy and Taylor's (1947) conception of scientific management. Both found their way into the public schools and dominate the research literature and the practical organizational behaviors of school administrators. They establish a hierarchy of offices and power which operate the schools as bureaucratic organizations, from the top down. Positivism fosters a behavioristic psychology resulting in a Skinnerian view of learning and teaching. It panders to learning styles that might be classified as generally left brain oriented. Further, logical positivistic thought results in a curriculum which is reductionistic (i.e. cut up into its smallest possible elements and taught in lock step linear order) and assumes that facts can be separated from values. Some observers insist that logical positivism has produced a hidden curriculum for teaching an uncritical respect for bureaucratic authority that, intentionally or not, results in support for, if not the creation of, economic class barriers that tend to prohibit rather then promote upward social mobility through the class structure it has created.

Alternatives to Positivistic Oriented Schooling

As early as the 1930s it was noticed that classical theories produced by logical positive paradigms failed to account for much of the behavior observable in organizations. Prominent among such is the work of Mary Parker Follett (1941) and Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939). Follett in her essays and Roethlisberger and Dickson in their classic Western Electric Study noted that classical theories of organizations developed along logical positivistic lines did not account for all that occurred in organizations. This work was followed by the Getzels and Guba's model (1957) in educational administration suggesting that the individual as well as bureaucratic needs and goals shaped organizational behavior. Still these and other research efforts, and their operational manifestations in the schools, were dominated by logical positivistic methodology, limiting options and requiring certain outcomes while, at the same time, prohibiting others.

From the age of Enlightenment until the present, positivism has been the paradigm for the natural sciences. Driven by the need to be "scientific", the social sciences have always "aped" the natural sciences in methodology, and psychology went to the length of adopting the term "behavioral science," thereby nearly blindly insisting on logical positivism as the only way of science and only path to truth. Education has modeled itself after psychology in the forlorn hope of gaining respectability within the community of scholars. Is it any wonder that education,

research in educational administration, and the practice of educational administration have produced logical positivistic organizational outcomes. Even those who occasionally note problems with classical theories seem bound to present alternatives within the same paradigm because they are intellectually incarcerated by their paradigm.

Since Kuhn (1962) there has been a strong movement away from logical positivism. That movement is known in its broadest generalized grouping, simply as post-positivism or post-Kuhnism. That paradigm has stimulated considerable research and publication in education. (see Gholson and Barker, 1985 and Howe 1985 for excellent summaries) In the organization and administration of education, which is of importance in this discussion, see Lotto (1987) regarding post-positivists theories and Bates (1985) regarding critical theory. In the social sciences see Marcus and Fisher (1986) in anthropology, and Ritzer (1981) in sociology. All of this work is an outgrowth of and contributes to the surge of post-positivism probably which may be the cutting edge of thought in public school organization and administration today. From these works emerge certain theories and concepts that present themselves as alternatives for organizing public education.

Organizational Alternatives for Education

Three major organizational alternatives to bureaucracy are loose coupling (Weick, 1976), organized anarchies and garbage can models (Cohen & March, 1974) and (March & Olson,

1976), and organizational culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1981). Although separate entities, each of these concepts have some commonalties and are "commensurate" in Kuhn's terms, that is they can be compared and, in some ways, combined.

Loose coupling is a theory which sees organizations, particularly educational organizations, as comprised of sub-systems free to deal with other subsystems by exhibiting a varied set of responses, within a wide set of time parameters. Thus, its proponents claim, while not conducive to rapid change, loose coupling tends to prevent an organization from over responding and therefore, enhances the organization's ability to persist and survive.

Organized anarchy holds that organizations can freely select (often from a historical prospective) the goals, solutions and means which are preferable and which uniquely suit them at some particular time. This process appears to be "anarchy" viewed from an outside perspective or as measured against externally formulated goals. But as organizations often have multiple and ambiguous goals this model allows the organization the freedom to move (actually in a organized way) toward a solution of these ambiguous goals/problems.

Finally, the concept of organizational culture views an organization as having a culture of its own and, existing in unique environment with unique goals. As a culture (a set of significant symbols, rules and receipts for understanding what is happening, what is needed, how it is to be done,

what is correct and rewarding, etc.) each organization will see different opportunities, select different stimuli and respond in different fashions. Such organizational behavior, then, can only be judged on the basis of its own unique cultural standard and is probably (if the organization is surviving) appropriate behavior for that organization. This view of the organization holds that the culture of the organization not only dictates its response but often makes most others impossible.

If one accepts these views of the school organization, and imperial reality suggests some truth to such description, then classical bureaucracy is not only an inappropriate organizational style but probably self defeating as well. Hierarchy, span of control, line/staff relationships, unilateral goal setting, and a number of other bureaucratic concepts presently used in educational organizations are harmful and counterproductive. Certainly using post-positivistic and critical theory concepts would produce a much different school organization.

Critical theory begins with a rejection of logical positivism and its assertion that things and objects are real and feelings and values are unreal, or at least not relevant concerns for science. It totally rejects the notion of bureaucracy with its top down authority seeing it as exploitive of the people who do the work. This is the reason the Frankfort School rejected Russian Communism as early as the 1920. It is easy to understand why a theory based on Marxist sociology would receive minimum attention

in the United States, particularly during the past eight years when the threat of communist domination by an "Evil Empire" hung heavy in the political rhetoric of our nation. We should separate, however, the theoretical work of Marx from the past and present Russian government. I rather believe Marx would have it that way if he could. Yes, critical theory is Neo-Marxist but it is not communism nor Russian. Remembering this we would, perhaps, be free to use it as a lens to see organizational alternatives.

In critical theory, organizational decisions begin with the people who do the work. This is not to say that this bottom-to-top power is exercised with absolute power. Administrators still have input into decision making. Yet the source of most initiatives and the majority of power rests not at the top but at the bottom of the organization. Bates (1985) draws attention to five characteristics of such an organization noted by Dunleavy (1982): (1) it does not accept at face value administrator accounts of the organizational process (such are not facts to be accepted as ultimate truth); (2) it challenges the truth of the notion of administrator neutrality (almost a corollary of #1); (3) it sees organizational change as more likely the result of crises as contrasted with gradual change (4) it views the function of decision making in the wider social/political context as the major criterion (as opposed to means/ends chains); and (5) it embraces popular participation as the major process of decision making. At least these last three

characteristics are basic tenets of the dissatisfaction theory of democracy which certainly did not stem from post-positivistic or critical theory.

As a model for understanding and structuring public education, critical theory would produce a very different governance structure in education. Such a structure according to Bates (1985:29) would "...involve the democratization of organizational and institutional life...[and be]...instrumental in depoliticizing the majority of the people."

The Present Reform in Texas

Earlier I noted that post-positivistic epistemology and critical theory were probably the cutting edge of thought in educational administration as a field of study and practice. That does not contend that this is the only school of thought, or that there are no longer positivists at work, or that their work is not useful in understanding and explaining school organization or administration. I truly am not ready to "throw out the baby with the bath water." Yet, if we can believe Bates' analyses, offered here, the present state of research in educational administration neglects, and generally ignores, the post-positivists and critical theorists. In like manner practitioners and politicians, the architects of the present educational reform, are either unaware of or unconcerned with the post-positivistic movement in science and in education.

The Texas reform has been driven solely by a logical positivistic mentality, and often a faulty one at that

(Lutz, 1988). The development of the required pupil achievement test in Texas is an example of logical positivistic thought and the production of weighted residual gain achievement scores is also a logical positivistic technique. The use of a criterion test and a residual gain score to rank the 1063 school districts in Texas is a misapplication of logical positivistic techniques, but still driven by that mind set. The state teacher rating procedure, used for placement in the career ladder, its development, appraiser training, scoring and application, is completely logical positivistic behaviorism in its views of the teaching/learning process, educational measurement, and the governance of schools. The drive to consolidate school districts and increase the power of the central state education agency is logical positivistic in essence and counter to a critical theory view of schooling and education, as is the centralization of curriculum and essential elements which have been put in place in Texas during the past five years.

The argument here is not whether the epistemology, (recognized or unrecognized) which has driven the Texas reform movement in the direction it has, is right or wrong. My argument simply points out that there were and are alternatives which could be taken, if post-positivistic and critical theory paradigms had been used. Further, I claim, whether good or bad, such a direction would have actually resulted in more reform and perhaps made teaching more

professional and education more democratized.

But let us not be too hard on the practitioners. It is not likely they will think or act far beyond the concepts provided for them in the university programs they attended or the research we asked them to read. It is certainly not my intent to fault the good work of the authors represented in the Handbook of Research in Educational Administration (Boyan, 1988). Nor do I believe that is the intent of Bates (1988). But Bates is generally correct when suggesting that the handbook neglects the work of post-positivists and nearly ignores critical theory. How could it help but do that as the research in our field is so dominated by logical positivism.

The post-positivists do not help the matter by merely choosing sides and accusing the positivists (some of whom may be closet post-positivists or closet critical theorists) of being obstructionists to the advancement of organizational theory. The real obstructionists are those in both camps who choose to attack the work of others whose methodology and paradigm does not agree with their own. Pity the fool (who may never get published) who suggest with Phillips (1987:23) that it is feasible to use both paradigms in order to obtain separate and different views of the organizations. In our temporal world there cannot be a single "reality," a single "truth." We can only seek "truth" and our ways of seeking should not be limited.

Why then this pretense that the post-positivistic paradigm does not exist and that critical theory is the

invention of an "evil empire." I think the answer lies in the reward structure inherent in the academic system invented by the logical positivists. Several years ago I asked "Where did all the young turks go?" (Lutz, 1986). My answer was, perhaps they simply got older. Here I have suggested that I am a closet post-positivists. Now let me startle everyone, including Griffiths himself, by saying, based on some of his writing, (e.g. Administrative Theory in Transition) that Griffiths may be a closet critical theorists. Take for instance his second "dominate idea":

> Theories will have to develop new approaches to the concept of authority and acknowledge the fact that people do not want to be governed (Griffiths, 1985:43).

To my mind that statement reeks of critical theory. Yet, no one can be viewed as more of a logical positivist than Griffiths. Positivism and imperialism are not exactly the same, however (Phillips, 1987:41), and Griffiths is also an empiricist. He could not help but observe that people not only do not want to be governed but often act in ways to subvert attempts at governance, particularly bureaucratic governance. Hence, some organized anarchy, loose coupling theory, and critical theory perspective of governance seem implicit in Griffiths' "dominate ideas." Such new theories will have to be given greater attention by the "gate-keepers" in educational administration. We will not have to, nor necessarily should we, buy them in wholesale fashion. If we do we assure ourselves of committing the same error as the pure logical positivists, that of denying

the possibility that we could be wrong about "our" truth.

In order to accomplish growth in educational administration we must take risks: the risk of positing new ideas, the risk of using or espousing a different epistemology, the risk of being wrong, the risk of not getting published, the risk of being "a turk." Whether older, like some of us, or younger like others, risk is necessary if research, theory and practice in educational organizational is to grow and improve. Who among us will take the risk?

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